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Inquiry Shows F.B.I. Informant May Have Aided Klan Violence

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ATLANTA, July 8 — A renewed investigation by Alabama authorities into murders during the 1960's civil rights movement has indicated that the Federal Bureau of Investigation's chief paid informant in the Ku Klux Klan might have been an agent-provocateur who participated in and helped plan the incidents that the F.B.I. hired him to monitor.

The informant, Gary Thomas Rowe Jr., has failed two polygraph — lie detector — tests in which he denied involvement in the 1963 bombing that killed four black children at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, according to records compiled by the Alabama Attorney General's staff and the Birmingham Police Department.

Statements Made to Police

Because of his "deceptive" answers on the polygraph tests Mr. Rowe is now suspected of having been in the group of Klansmen who planted dynamite at the church before dawn on Sept. 15, 1963. For five years, he received monthly payments of $20 to $300 from the F.B.I.

The reports of the polygraph examiners also indicated that Mr. Rowe was "attempting deception" in denying involvement in the firebombing of the home of A.G. Gaston, a black millionaire in Birmingham, and in setting off shrapnel bombs that, investigators said, were intended to maim passersby in a black neighborhood.

Mr. Rowe is also quoted in investigative files as having made incriminating statements in the presence of two Birmingham policemen about his role in the killing of Viola G. Liuzzo, a civil rights marcher shot to death near Selma, Ala.,

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Washington, a spokesman for the F.B.I. said today that the agency had "no comment" about allegations that Mr. Rowe had provoked violence while employed by the bureau. The spokesman, Tom Harrington, said he could not confirm reports that the agency had received copies of Mr. Rowe's polygraph tests.

Mr. Rowe's attorney could not be reached for comment.

The Luizzo case brought Mr. Rowe, a former nightclub bouncer, national attention in 1965 when his testimony, under F.B.I. protection and a grant of immunity from state and Federal prosecutors, sent three Birmingham Klansmen to prison.

New Identity With F.B.I. Help

In 1975, wearing a hood to protect the new identity he has assumed with the help of the F.B.I., Mr. Rowe told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Operations that the bureau had encouraged him to participate in acts of violence as part of his undercover work within the Klan. Shortly thereafter, Alabama authorities contacted Mr. Rowe in the hope that he might become a prosecution witness in their renewed investigation of the 1963 church bombing.

But after two polygraph tests and six hours of interrogation with Mr. Rowe, state investigators and Birmingham city detectives now contend that he may have been with Robert E. Chambliss in the car that delivered the bomb to the 16th Street Baptist Church. At the least, the investigators believe, Mr. Rowe probably had prior knowledge that the bomb had been planted and failed to report it to the Federal bureau in time to save the four young girls who died when it went off during Sunday services.

Mr. Chambliss, a 74-year-old Klansman, was convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life in prison last November for the bombing; In September and October, Mr. Rowe submitted to polygraph tests and questioning in California, where his attorney lived. At that time, the staff of Attorney General Bill Baxley of Alabama was preparing the case against Mr. Chambliss.

Investigative documents indicate that in the first polygraph test, Mr. Rowe "showed strong and consistent unresolved deception responses" when he said he was not with the group that planted the bomb at the church. The polygraph examiner concluded that Mr. Rowe "was attempting deception" in denying a role in that and two other bombings.

Examiner Found Charts 'Deceptive'

Mr. Rowe then asked to be tested by a polygraph examiner of his own choosing. The second examiner also found his charts "deceptive" when he denied taht he was present when the bomb was planted. The second examiner then added to his report to the Alabama Attorney General's Office an observation that has caused some difference of opinion among investigators.

"From a subjective point of view," the examiner wrote, "I should point out that the charts, even though they are deceptive by the criteria we use, are not what I would expect to see from a person who is actually responsible for the planting of the bomb."

"The charts are more consistent," the examiner continued, "with what we see when a person is withholding vital information, even though they are technically answering the question truthfully."

According to sources close to the investigation, the ranking Birmingham detective assigned to the case remains convinced that Mr. Rowe was in the car with Mr. Chambliss at the church, even if Mr. Rowe did not personally place the bomb against the church wall.

Different Theory Is Offered

State investigators have suggested a different theory to explain the "decep-

tion" indicated by the polygraph tests and the "vital information" Mr. Rowe is suspected of withholding. Mr. Rowe, it is said, may have thought the bomb was supposed to go off around 4 A.M., before anyone came to the church for services.

The F.B.I. files, in fact, record a call from Mr. Rowe to an agent in Birmingham that Sunday morning in which Mr. Rowe asked if anyone had heard a bomb go off about daylight. Not long after Mr. Rowe hung up, the bomb at the 16th Street Church exploded. Mr. Rowe now denies having made the call to the F.B.I.

"My best estimate was that he knew in advance it was happening," said one investigator. "He thought it was going off at 4 A.M., but it went off and killed those kids, and then he can't come forward. How's he going to admit that he knew they were going to put a bomb out and then didn't tell? If he didn't help — if he just had prior knowledge — he's still got a problem. I don't believe the F.B.I. would have given him immunity."

In any event, state investigators have not ruled out the possibility that Mr. Rowe may have been with Mr. Chambliss at the church.

Meanwhile, they have developed information that contradicts Mr. Rowe's contention that he was not close to Mr. Chambliss, even though both were members of the Klan "action squads" that carried out "missionary work," the Klan euphemism for violent activity.

Pair Had 'Excellent Relationship'

Investigators assert, however, that the two men had "an excellent relationship" and that, in his undercover reports on the church bombing, Mr. Rowe guided Federal agents away from Mr. Chambliss. The files record Mr. Chambliss as having praised Mr. Rowe in by saying: "You can trust Rowe to kill a nigger and never talk."

Ironically, the picture of Mr. Rowe now being developed by the investigators seems to support the contentions of Klan leaders that Mr. Rowe purposely led Klansmen into violence so that he would have information to sell the F.B.I.

Ther heave been news reports that Mr. Rowe — who testified that almost one-third of his 1964 income of $5,600 came from the F.B.I. — was employed under a Federal-informant program in which participants were paid according to the volume and quality of information they supplied.

Investigative reports on a "double bombing involving shrapnel" that took place 10 days after the 16th Baptist Street Church bombing have caused investigators to place some value on charges that Mr. Rowe may have helped stage the incident that he reported for pay.

Police Saw Him Near Scene

The Birmingham police spotted Mr. Rowe only four blocks from the scene of the two explosions. F.B.I. records state that Mr. Rowe telelphoned in his report in the few minutes between the first and second explosions, and a polygraph examiner concluded that there was deception in Mr. Rowe's denial that he was directly involved.

Mr. Rowe's testimony in the Liuzzo case has also raised questions about whether he was a participant or an undercover informant. In two state murder trials and one Federal conspiracy trial, Mr. Rowe admitted that he was in the car with three Klansman who chased Mrs. Luizzo on a lonely stretch of highway between Montgomery and Selma.

Mr. Rowe contended, however, that he merely pretended to shoot at Mrs. Luizzo, and that one of his companions actually fired the shots that killed the Detroit woman, who had come to Alabama for the Selma-to-Montgomery march led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The investigators have statements from two Birmingham policemen who quoted Mr. Rowe as indicating he was a particpant in the slaying. Mr. Rowe has described one of the officers as a friend and a Ku Klux Klan sympathizer with whom he rode in a police patrol car.

United Press International

Gary Thomas Rowe Jr. ducked away from photographers as be arrived at court in Hayneville, Ala., in May 1965, to testify at trial of accused murderer of Mrs. Viola G. Liuzzo, a civil rights worker slain near Selma.